

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

THERE was a dead silence in the room. It was North's room in the hospital, and the early afternoon sunshine was streaming in; it was only forty-eight hours since the cold, wet day which had seen Bryan Armistage in the same room, but the weather had changed as completely in that short interval as though a month of spring had intervened. Standing on the hearthrug with his back to the unnecessary little fire and his hands behind him, was an elderly man with iron-grey hair; he was one of North's colleagues on the staff of the hospital, and his deeply-lined, rather stern face was turned with an air of keen observation upon the only other occupant of the room, North Branstons himself, who stood by the window gazing out into the sunshine.

The elder man did not speak; apparently he respected his companion's rather pronounced stillness. And after a moment North turned slowly towards him. His face was rather white and rigidly controlled.

"I am not surprised," he said. "I have suspected something of what you say for some time." He paused, and then added in a low, restrained voice: "Has she any suspicion herself? Was she alarmed?"

The other man cast a quick, shrewd glance at him.

"It is difficult to say," he returned. "Mrs. Vallotson is a lady of extraordinary reserve, and, I should say, of considerable fortitude. Some idea as to the direction in which her symptoms point she must have,

however, I imagine; though of course it is not likely that she guesses the extent of the mischief."

"What did you tell her?"

"She asked me no questions."

There was another silence, and then North said slowly:

"If it is as you think at present, there is nothing to be done."

"Nothing effective," asserted the elder man. "Of the main fact, as I told you, there is no doubt. As to the possibility of treatment and so forth I shall be able to judge better when I have seen her again. But, of course, cure is out of the question."

"How far has it gone?"

A few brief technical sentences came from the other man.

"If we can operate," he concluded gravely, "she may live a year, or even longer. If not——"

He finished his sentence with a slight expressive movement of his shoulders.

A moment or two elapsed before North spoke.

"When do you see her again?" he said.

"In a week," was the reply. The elder man added a few technical details as to the reasons which had determined the length of the interval, and as he finished, North came forward into the room.

"Thank you, Grant," he said. "It is very good of you to undertake the case for me."

Dr. Grant knew something, though not all, of his colleague's story, and he looked rather curiously at the speaker.

"Not at all," he said. "I am only sorry to have had to tell you this, Branstons." He held out his hand with an impulse of cordiality by no means usual with him, and then said hurriedly: "Shall we go down now?"

The wards were visited; the regular

hospital routine, which had been awaiting the appearance of the two doctors, was gone through; and then North Branston ascended the stone staircase once more, and entered his own room alone. He flung himself into his arm-chair and leaned forward, gazing straight before him.

He was not surprised. His keen professional eyes had observed his mother too closely and too long to allow of much room for doubt in his mind as to what, in broad outline, would be the result of the medical interview which he had urged upon her. He had suspected for some time past that she was very ill; and his doctor's mind was too intimately acquainted with the slight dividing line which separates, in such disease as that from which he believed her to be suffering, the grave from the fatal, to render the development of his suspicions in the least strange to him. But though the sentence pronounced found him by no means unprepared, it came upon him as a shock which shook him through and through.

She was to die. The slow, sullen rebellion of her life was to be cut off. The long course of blind, stubborn wrong was to cease; the bitter steps of her life's journey were drawing to an end.

The educating processes of this life are, for the most part, slow and still. A moral earthquake may prepare the mind, but it is in the heavy, laborious quiet that follows that are instilled, letter by letter, the truths of which the earthquake was the herald. The process goes on silently, unhastily, and the stunned creature, living and enduring from day to day, is hardly conscious that he is learning anything. Then, in that same routine there comes a check; something occurs to change the current of life. The stunned condition from which he has all this time been slowly emerging, drops from him suddenly, and some sense—faint or uncertain it may be, but inalienable—of the truth as yet but half spelt out dawns upon him.

Through some such process as this North Branston had passed during the past six months, and with the death sentence to which he had just listened there had come upon him that complete clearance of the senses which is the condition of final comprehension. Day by day as he trod the path that stretched before him over the ruins of what might have been; day by day as that exaltation which is born of great crises died out; as loneliness grew into his life, as the strain of that only intercourse vouchsafed him,

pressed with ever increasing weight upon him; he had been waking from that quiescence which had bowed his head before an inexorable presence, featureless and without name. As day after day brought its relentless claim upon that finer nature in him, released and given play for the first time; each with its pitiless demand upon his merey, his endurance, his patience; he had been learning, learning in all unconsciousness, the first syllables of that lesson which alone could unveil for him that presence and reveal the meaning of the sword it bore.

And as charity—that supreme sense of a common nature flowing from a common source—is the perfect flower of that lesson, so, even in his first faltering and unconscious spelling out of it, there had risen in North Branston a great pity and tenderness for that fellow-scholar who would not—who could not—learn. Centre of his life still, his mother was at once his educator and that which his growing knowledge illumined. Watching the slow torture of her strife with fate, her blind incomprehension, her unyielding defiance, the tragedy of her life had disengaged itself from the tragedy of his own, until it stood out sharp and distinct against the black background of sin, and cried for a solution. Even her hatred of himself became to him only another element in that tragedy. She was his mother. Out of the constant forbearance of his intercourse with her; out of his position as her sole dependence; above all, out of that pity for her which grew in him, dawned a strange sense of the mysterious meaning the words contained. She was his mother. Love between them could never be. But something he might have given her, if she would have received anything at his hands; something that might have held for both of them some touch of balm.

And now she was to die. He sat there staring blankly before him, and all the meaning of the words came home to him. She was to die. The hand that had smitten once, that had forced the cup of retribution to her rebellious lips, was raised to strike again, and this time on the blow would follow silence. Without volition on her own part her life had been crushed; without volition on her own part it was to be withdrawn. She was to die, and death for North Branston meant annihilation. Was that indeed the sole solution of the tragedy? Was that indeed the end?

To all the processes which he could follow, at least, it brought cessation. The

fierce unconquerable heart was to be stilled; the working brain was to return to the elements of which it was composed. It was the physical finality beyond which North Branston had not looked for years; the boundary line at which he had deliberately elected to stop. And thus brought face to face with it, the question rose in him clear and distinct—to what purpose had been all this agony? To what end had been lived this life, which, as the shadow of conclusion rolled down upon it, seemed to be lighted up for him with a ghastly distinctness? And as he asked himself the question, the power which had risen before him six months earlier to dominate and stun him, rose before his cleared and steadier perception, and challenged him to name it.

The two questions—the question which he asked of death, and the question wrung from him by life—were indissolubly knit together. If that physical life, drawing now to an inexorable end, was indeed all; if that blind, impervious spirit was to be quenched thus at random; if the pitiless discipline of life had no meaning and no intention beyond itself, then the force that dominated humanity was a mechanical force, a power neither of good nor evil, purposeless, meaningless. If, on the other hand, that power was sentient; if behind its dealings with mankind there was a living will, a changeless intention, an unfathomable beauty, then those processes, seen here so incomplete and objectless, must have an object beyond the ken of the materialist, must reach completion in another life than this.

The proposition was formulated in North Branston's mind clear-cut and distinct, and he faced it steadily and deliberately. Sudden revolutions of belief are not common with men; with men of North's type they are perhaps impossible. The changed faith lies in a man's mind, looked at still as a mere possibility long after it has become conviction. Even as he sat there, absorbed in every fibre by the question before him, its answer lay within him, strong and silent, waiting until the unhurrying processes of time should bring it recognition.

More than an hour passed and he had not moved. At last a sigh parted his lips. He let his hands fall forward over his knees as he lifted his head, pausing a moment, as though his mind were only gradually coming back from the depths in which it had been wandering. Then he rose, pushing back the grey hair from his forehead, and looking

about him rather uncertainly. He glanced at the clock. It was nearly five, and with an instinctive desire for air and exercise he determined to walk home.

It was a lovely afternoon. The sun was setting, but the air was still soft, and even in the City there was a breeze. North Branston, threading his way with regular, even stride along the crowded pavement, lifted his head with unconscious satisfaction to meet it. Coming eventually to Piccadilly, and finding himself on the more frequented north side, he prepared to cross to where the Green Park stretched away, quiet and lovely, with its first faint veil of green touched by the sunset light. He was just turning towards the road when the door of a shop on his right hand opened suddenly, and a lady came rapidly out, turning in the opposite direction to that in which North was walking, thus directly meeting him. For the first time for six months; for the first time since he had left her unconscious in her own drawing-room; he was face to face with Eve Karslake.

Eve Karslake, or Eve Karslake's ghost? The features were sharpened and haggard; the colouring had faded to a dead level of pallor varied only by the dark shadows that lay beneath the eyes; and the eyes themselves burned with an unquenchable fire of misery and rebellion. Every line of her face told of pain; of pain known for the first time; of pain as a tyrant, resented, cried out against, and inexorable.

They were close together. There was nothing remarkable about a man and a woman meeting on the pavement in Piccadilly; and on either side of them the passers-by went on their way unheeding. The recognition had been simultaneous on either side, and for a long moment the eyes of each were fastened on the other's face. Then North Branston recovered himself; recovered, that is to say, such a rigid self-control as alone was possible. He bowed slightly, and was preparing to pass on. But as he moved Lady Karslake moved also. She slightly stretched out her hand. It was the slightest possible movement, but there was a swift tenseness about it which made it as eloquent as a cry could have been.

"No," she said rapidly. The music of her voice was gone, and it was low and hoarse. "I must speak to you—I must!"

He had stopped instantly.

"Where?" he said. He spoke as though he hoped, by the commonplace query, and all the sordid, commonplace difficulty it suggested, to still the intensity of her feelings.

She glanced about her quickly.

"The Park," she said.

Without another word she turned swiftly towards the road, and without another word he followed her. They passed into the Green Park, and turned down one of its little frequented paths, side by side.

It was very quiet there. The roar of London seemed to subside and grow less with every step they took. The light was waning, and the stillness of coming twilight was creeping over everything. The voices of some children playing on the grass came floating over the evening air, their discordant shrillness softened by distance; but, for the rest, the Park was almost empty.

But the silence between them remained unbroken. They walked on mechanically, neither glancing at the other.

At last, with a vague instinct towards lessening for her the strain which was becoming unendurable, North turned and looked at her. Her face was quivering helplessly. They were close to a seat, and he stopped abruptly.

"Sit down!" he said.

There was authority in his voice, and she obeyed him instinctively. She sank down on the seat, turning away from him as she did so, and letting her face fall forward for an instant on her hands with a swift, expressive movement of self-humiliation.

"I can't," she gasped. "I've longed to say it. It has been killing me—killing me—killing me! And now—I can't!"

North's face worked painfully as he stood beside her, looking down upon her bowed head. His lips moved, but no sound came from between them. A moment passed, and then she lifted her head to him in a passion of self-compulsion.

"I will!" she cried. "I will! What does it matter if it kills me to say it? North, North, forgive me! I loathe myself so! I despise myself so! I can't forget it! I can't get away from it! If I could blot out what I said! If I could even unsay it! Oh, North, North, North, I would live through it all again—I would bear anything—if I could only wipe those words out of my life!"

She had not raised her voice; she was speaking hardly above her breath; but the intensity of her utterance shook her from head to foot. The pallor of her face had given way, a burning colour flooded her throat and the very roots of her hair. She broke off, choked.

North had listened to her, transfixed and motionless, the original heart wrung

incomprehension of his expression giving way to incredulous protestation and pain. As she paused he drew a step nearer with a low, incoherent ejaculation.

"Eve," he said, "don't speak like that, for Heaven's sake!"

She interrupted him sharply, wildly.

"I've lived like that," she cried, "all these months—all these long, horrible months. Everything has been more unendurable to me because of it. Oh, North, I've realised what I must have seemed to you. I've realised it, do you understand? And I've thought if you could only know how I hated myself—how it wasn't I who spoke at all, but something bad and dreadful—"

She had risen as she spoke, stretching out two imploring hands. And as her voice faltered and grew faint, all his strength rose in North Branston to comfort and support her. He took the two trembling hands into a firm and gentle hold, and met her eyes with a face on which nothing appeared but reverence and tenderness.

"I do know," he said. "If it comforts you that I should know it, I have known it all the time."

"That I was mad?" she reiterated. She was clinging to his hands as though she hardly realised to what she held. "That it was because I loved you so? That I was like people hurt too much, who will say anything, do anything, to get rid of the pain? You know it?"

"I know it," he said again.

"And you haven't grown to hate me and despise me?"

He did not answer her in words, but he smiled. She looked at him for a moment, and then the strain relaxed. Her lips quivered like a child's; she covered her face with her hands, and sat down suddenly in a passion of silent weeping.

North did not watch her; he realised instinctively that her tears were the tears of unutterable relief, and he turned his face away and let them flow unchecked; while every low sound of her crying cut him to the heart.

Rooted and grounded in that past from which the North Branston of to-day was for ever divided, his love alone had survived that catastrophe which had crushed out all that love's hopes, and in the midst of the new conditions of his mental being it burnt on unquenched, unquenchable. It is not in the supreme moment of parting that severed lives know their worst pain.

It is in the weary days that follow, when the heart must hunger and grow sick with hunger, unsatisfied; when the weary longing for a look, a word aches through every sense; when the sun rises and sets, and brings only the knowledge that it must rise and set for as long as life shall last on a world empty of the one presence desired; it is then that love passes through the fire to come out conquered or conqueror. Day by day as he worked on uncomplaining, North's heart had been wrung in his yearning for the woman he loved. The thought of her suffering had never left him; the longing for her presence had haunted him by day and night. In the moment of his renunciation of her its flame had shot up white and strong, consuming all the narrow limits which had closed it in. And in the clearer air which gradually surrounded it, it had only rarefied and grown stronger.

Her weeping ceased at last. He heard her move and lean back against the seat as though worn out. He looked at her uncertainly, and she met his eyes and tried to smile.

"I am better," she said; her voice was faint and weak, but the sharp note of agony rang in it no longer. "I am very sorry." She paused, and looked away through the shadowy trees that loomed up about them. "I do not loathe myself so much," she said, "but—it makes so little difference."

He did not speak; there was nothing he could say. There was another brief silence and then she roused herself.

"We must go directly," she said in a level, monotonous voice. "Tell me what you are doing—where you are living!"

He told her briefly, and then he paused. He hardly understood what instinct dictated his next words.

"I am not alone," he said quietly.

She looked up at him swiftly and understood. Her face crimsoned, and she lifted her hand as if to stop him.

"You hurt me," she said. "Don't."

There was disgust and protest in the last word, and North saw that her brows were drawn together and her lips set. He hesitated for an instant, and then said in a low voice:

"You can't—forgive?"

"Forgive!"

Into the two syllables there was compressed such an unutterable scorn and negation as no flow of speech could have amplified. Upon that knowledge which

had come to North so recently they struck jarring and discordant, and he spoke quickly.

"Try to think gently of her," he said.

"Try to think gently of her!" she repeated; she rose with a swift, impetuous movement. "The thought of her is an insult to me—can't you understand? I try—I try with all my heart never to think of her at all. The thought of her existence is a horror to me."

"It will not be for long!"

The words came from him almost in spite of himself, and they arrested her.

"What do you mean?" she said slowly.

He answered her very quietly.

"She has not long to live," he said.

"Is she—ill?"

He spoke two brief sentences, and as she heard them the haughty protest died out of Lady Karlake's face before a flash of womanly horror. She did not speak for a moment.

"That means horrible pain?" She was shuddering a little, and her eyes had dilated.

"Pain or stupefaction—yes," he said heavily.

"Does she know?"

"Not yet."

"Ah, poor thing!"

As the cry escaped her, she forced her lips together and stood motionless, fighting the imagination which was forcing itself upon her almost against her will.

"Is—her daughter with her?" She spoke abruptly, almost fiercely.

"No, she is quite alone."

She did not answer; but she lifted both hands to her head as though the struggle within were physically distressing to her. Then she glanced quickly round her. It was growing almost dark.

"I must go," she said hurriedly. "I must. Oh, I wish—I wish you hadn't told me this." She paused and looked at him. "You have forgiven her!" she said.

"I have not thought of it," he said simply.

She turned away from him sharply.

"You are so strong," she cried brokenly.

"So strong! Oh, North, North, why must it be? What have we done that we should suffer so? Why were we born if it was only for this? It does no good; it serves no purpose; it leads to nothing."

And then, with the agonised voice of the woman he loved ringing in his ears, the conviction so long latent in North Branstons's soul sprang into active life and clothed itself in words. He drew a step

nearer to her. His eyes were fastened on her, and in their depths there was a struggling perception, before which all the lines of his face seemed to alter and gain alike in dignity and strength.

"That's our mistake," he said. His voice was very low; it came from between set teeth. "We were not born for this, but for that to which this is to lead. There is a purpose in the life of every man; yes, even of the most wretched. I think it is because the limits of that purpose are beyond our comprehension; because its depths are vaster than we can plumb that we ignore it and deny it."

She had grown very still, and as he paused she lifted her head and looked at him, startled, uncomprehending. She did not speak, and he went on again, the glow in his eyes deepening.

"This world is not the end," he said. "That's why its riddle is so hard to read. But I believe there is an answer, and I can wait to know it."

She looked at him for a moment longer, her brows drawn together, her eyes half wild.

"I don't understand," she said. "I don't understand. I only know that we suffer; that we suffer horribly; suffer for sins not ours. I only feel the misery of life and its intolerable injustice."

He took her hands gently into his own.

"We must be patient," he said. "Nothing else will help us. Nothing else will teach us anything."

HAUNTING MEMORIES.

A STORY OF THREE NEW YEARS' EVES.

I.

It happened long years ago, but I remember it well, as if it were yesterday. We sat round the fire telling stories, and with our merry laughter drowning the sobbing of the dying year. I was just in the most thrilling part of a gruesome ghost story when my brother Philip started up, saying: "Hush! What's that? I am sure I heard a child's cry." We listened, and when we were about to ridicule him, the cry was heard again. My father left his seat and opened the door to see who it was.

It was a fearful night; the wind and sleet swept into the hall, and seemed to waft to my ears a low, mocking laugh.

An exclamation from my father made us rush out pell-mell. There, standing in the

snow, was the very loveliest girl it is possible to imagine. She was about three years old, and I was fifteen. Seeing us, she came forward and lisped:

"Mammie done, and me so told."

Of course we took the little one in, and searched near and far for any trace of her relatives, but we could learn nothing. Before many weeks had passed she had so twined her little self about our hearts that we feared any one might turn up and take her from us. We called her Eve, for two reasons. One was because she came to us on New Year's Eve, and the other because she was the only female among us, except our old servant, Margaret.

I, Fred Dempster, was the youngest of seven boys. The day my eyes opened to the light of earth closed my mother's for ever.

II.

Eve was the treasure of the household as we grew together from childhood to maturity. Fifteen years later—I remember it well—I was sitting in the dining-room, idly gazing upon the lawn. Suddenly the door was flung open, and as suddenly closed again; but not before I had caught sight of flowing draperies.

"Eve," I cried, "Eve, come here. I want to speak to you seriously."

She sprang into the room with a bound.

"Well, Fred," she said, laughing mischievously, "what's wrong with the—oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't mean it, and I didn't say it either, did I? I am trying so hard not to talk slang, but you have delighted in teaching it to me ever since I was a little girl; and when you see that the seed has taken root you—well, you don't like it. That's all."

Something in my face—perhaps a fleeting expression—must have told her my thoughts. She coloured a little, and with a merry twinkle in her eyes, though somewhat nervous in her manner, she said:

"Please don't, Fred. Like the little maid in the poem, you are seven, and all have spoken seriously to me except the first and the seventh; the first never will, and I do not want the seventh to do so."

The sweet young lips quivered slightly, and tears trembled on the long drooping eyelashes. It was no wonder I loved her. She was as lovely as a dream. Her golden hair, kissed by the sun, rippled over her head in rich wavy masses, and curled on her pure, fair brow as if it loved to linger there.

"Eve, Eve," I said, "what do you mean?"

Surely you know that I love you—have loved you for years. Can you not love me a little?"

There was no answer. Her golden head drooped lower and lower, until her chin rested upon a bunch of kingcups that was pinned in her dress. Her trembling hand sought them, and she pressed them lovingly.

"What am I to understand by your silence, Eve?" I asked. "Have you no heart to give? Only tell me, dear," I pleaded, "and I will go away and never trouble you any more."

Ah, me! How well I recollect those words, and how she bashfully crept into my outstretched arms, saying softly:

"No, no, Fred, you must not go. I love you!"

And then, as if ashamed of her confession, she hid her face on my breast, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

III.

MONTHS passed away since our declaration of love, but no amount of coaxing or reasoning would induce Eve to talk of our wedding. One evening I was restless, and went into the grounds to smoke a cigarette. It was midnight. The house was hushed in slumber. I walked on, fearing nothing. Presently I thought I heard a footstep. Yes, I was not mistaken; a firm, light tread trampled on the crisp leaves at every step. I waited breathlessly. A tall, slim man, clad in a heavy overcoat, came in sight, and walked deliberately to the side of the house in which Eve had her room. Lifting some gravel, he threw it lightly at her bedroom window. A moment—it seemed an eternity to me—and Eve, with a light cloak thrown over the dress she had worn that evening at dinner, came out, and noiselessly closed the door behind her. One moment she hesitated until her eyes got accustomed to the darkness, and then she was enfolded in the arms of the stranger.

Oh, the torture and agony of that fearful night! But the morning dawned at length, clear and beautiful; and Eve, as fresh and innocent-looking as ever, met me at the breakfast-table.

I was mad with love, wounded pride, and jealousy. After breakfast I followed her, and asked her again to name a date for our wedding. Laying her two little hands on mine, she stood up on her toes, and held up her sweet flower-face to be kissed. I stooped and kissed her.

"Fred, darling," she said, "why are you so impatient? We are very happy."

"Eve," I asked, "who is the man you met last night in the grounds?"

She looked up at me quickly, her large velvety eyes filled with tears.

"I cannot tell you, Fred; I cannot break my promise."

I would not be satisfied with that; hard words were interchanged, and I left her in anger.

IV.

It was another New Year's Eve—sharp and frosty; a moonlight night, resonant with the sounds of an icebound world. I could not rest, for Eve had promised to tell me her secret that night, and had failed to do so; she did not even keep the appointment which she had made to meet me. As I walked out into the open road a little later, I fancied I heard voices. I was not mistaken. Some one was talking near a clump of trees some distance away. Thinking they were poachers, I hurried forward and listened. Imagine my dismay when I recognised the voice. It was Eve's, raised in angry determination.

"I tell you," she said, "I will end it to-night. I shall——"

"You must not. I tell you again it is impossible; you must forget him. Fred can never be your husband, but I dare not tell you why as yet."

Her companion was the man I had seen her with before, and my blood being roused, I broke in upon them and demanded an explanation. I suppose I must have approached him in a threatening manner, for with a wild, frightened air he drew back, and pulled out a revolver. I closed with him. Owing to the frozen nature of the ground we slipped. There was a flash, a report, and a low, sharp cry. The next moment Eve staggered forward, and I caught her in my arms.

V.

"THAT is," said Eve, pointing to the man, "my mother. . . . Fred, I have always been true to you." Those were her last words. A little later the eyelids quivered, the lips settled into a sweet smile, and my darling was dead.

VI.

It was all too true. Eve's companion was a woman in the disguise of a man; she was indeed Eve's mother, my brother Philip's wife, whom he had married abroad and deserted.

Ay, it was all too true. And every New Year's Eve I hear that cruel shot again. Hark!

THE HUMOURS OF SALES.

TURNING over the leaves of a contemporary magazine the other day, I chanced to come upon "A Reverie at Christie's," written by a well-known writer. It set me thinking of the strange perversity of fate which follows the collections of the man who has pursued with an intensity of purpose through his lifetime his one idea. For this he has spared neither time, trouble, money; he has been happy when he has added a gem to the gathering, he has fretted for days when he has missed an opportunity; and now he is dead and the whole valuable collection is sold without reserve. Here there is a moral deep enough to make us reflect if we only read it aright. "Sic transit gloria mundi" should be the motto of auction rooms; they are better than sermons, and the auctioneer in his rostrum speaks as from a pulpit. His hammer likewise conveys a lesson, that is, if we are in the vein to hear it; it taps as it were a death-knell to old associations. Look at that beautiful lady! She was painted by Sir Joshua to please a loving husband, a fond father, or an admiring friend. It was a gala day when the picture came home, and was hung in the place of honour; it has never left that place until now, when it is exposed to a strange world of critics, dealers, buyers. There is something pathetic in its solitude in a crowd. But worse again, there are the letters, the innermost secrets of hearts that loved one another, of those who once were friends but who quarrelled for some trifling cause, and here we have the early intimacy set up for sale. If they could have only known when they wrote these tender words that they would be read by cold eyes, canvassed by cold hearts, knocked down for ten shillings or half-a-crown! To my mind there is infinite pathos in those yellow, discoloured mementoes of a dead and gone past, once as present as our own, in the expressions of family affection, the curiously fine strokes of the writing, the little abbreviation, the turns and flourishes. They touch me more than do the enamelled watches that belonged to Marie Antoinette or Mary Stuart, or the powder-horn of Charles Edward. I am afraid even the necklet worn by Helen of Troy would stir me very little in comparison to one of Mary Lamb's or poor L.E.L.'s letters, over which so many tears were shed.

Thinking of auctions takes us back a

long road. They are very ancient institutions, dating back so far as the setting up of the imperial crown on the ramparts of Rome to public auction. This is too far back for our purpose now; those who wish to read a graphic account of the incident must take down their Gibbon. I like better to think of the auctions Horace Walpole talks of to Sir Horace Mann, where he bought his snuff-boxes and his Sèvres cups, and the china monsters which filled up his narrow staircase at Strawberry Hill, where they were oftentimes nearly swept away by the flowing skirts of his fair visitors.

Walpole was oftener taken in at these sales than not. Many of his swans were geese after all, and when his sale came on fetched but meagre prices.

As we cast a glance backward, we see all the celebrities of the last century in the auction rooms: Dr. Johnson and Boswell, Lord Charlemont with Murphy, Lady Wortley Montagu, Angelica Kaufmann, Richardson, Pitt, the Prince Regent. Let us look into Millington's rooms in Bedford Street, Covent Garden; the time, four o'clock, and all the belles and beaux bidding against one another. It was not the custom to have dealers, so the contest was exciting and the bidding very high. It soon grew as great a necessity for a fine lady or gentleman to attend Millington's as to lose money at cards, and when the fashionables went out of town to Tunbridge Wells or Bath, Millington preceded them, and indulged them with their favourite amusement. As demand invariably produces supply, there soon arose an army of auctioneers and dealers all eager to profit by the gullibility of rich patrons. Cocks, the successor of Millington in the favour of the nobility, opened sale-rooms in the Piazza, Covent Garden. They were elegantly fitted up and refreshments were served. Here, in 1741, the collection of Edward Earl of Orford was sold, his Greek and Roman antiquities, scarce editions, and books of prints and drawings. The sums realised at these sales were enormous, and seem to have created a bitter feeling in the minds of the artists who were painting for starvation prices. Hogarth was especially indignant at the picture jobbers and dealers who imported ship-loads of Dead Christs, Holy Families, and Madonnas, "on which they scrawl the names of Italian masters and fix upon Englishmen the name of 'dupes.'" He complains "that if a gentleman with some judgement casts his eyes on one of these subjects, and expresses doubt as to its originality or perfection, the quack answers:

"Sir, you are no connoisseur; the picture, I assure you, is in Alesso Baddmaestro's best manner. Truly sublime; the contour gracious; the air of the head in the high Greek taste, and a most divine idea it is," then spitting upon an obscure place and rubbing it with a handkerchief, he takes a skip to t'other side of the room, and screams out: 'There's an amazing touch!' The gentleman, ashamed to be out of fashion by judging for himself, is struck dumb by this cant, and gives a vast sum for the picture, very modestly confessing that he is indeed quite ignorant of painting, and bestows upon a frightful picture with a hard name a frame worth fifty pounds."

The same complaint was to be heard everywhere, but still the evil grew; skilful dealers and ignorant buyers made it easy for artful persons to manufacture pictures which passed as old masters. This illegitimate traffic was largely followed and cleverly executed. Waagen, who visited most of the collections in England not many years ago, has left on record his surprise at finding so many pictures in different fine collections bearing the names of masters who never painted them. The growing extent of this injurious habit gave rise to a satire by Foote in one of his entertainments called "Tea," given at the Haymarket in 1757. The scene is supposed to be an auction room, but first we have the painting room of the arch conspirator, Mr. Puff. To him enters Carmine, his confederate, who is all anxiety to know how the last sale of pictures went.

"The Guido, what did it fetch?"

"PUFF.—One hundred and thirty guineas.

"CARMINE.—Hum! four guineas the frame, three the painting. Then we divide one hundred and twenty-three.

"PUFF.—Hold, not so fast! Varnish had two pieces for bidding against Squander, Brush five for bringing Sir Tawdry Trifle."

Upon this Carmine waxes very wroth, and is only appeased by Puff, who puts the case very clearly before him.

"Your Susannah," he says, "cannot have cost you more than twenty pounds, and by the addition of your lumber-room dirt and the salutary application of the spalting-pot it became a Guido worth one hundred and thirty pounds. Besides, in all traffic of this kind there must be combination. Varnish and Brush are our Jackals, and it is but fair they should partake of the prey. Courage, my boy, never fear! Praise be to folly and fashion! There are in this town dupes enough to gratify the avarice of all."

Then comes the auction. Puff is disguised as the Baron de Gröningen; Carmine as Canto; and the Jackals, Brush and Varnish, bring in Lord Dupe. Between them he is made to buy a St. Anthony of Padua for a large price.

Hogarth, who was in the habit of attending Cocks's auction rooms, conceived there the idea of holding an auction of his paintings at the "Golden Head" in Leicester Fields. For his ticket of admission he produced his well-known etching of the Battle of the Pictures. On the print is inscribed, "The bearer hereof is entitled, if he thinks proper, to be a bidder for Mr. Hogarth's pictures which are to be sold the last day of the month." In one corner he has represented an auction room, on the roof of which he has placed a weathercock, an allusion to Cocks. Instead of the four letters N.E.S.W. we have P.U.F.S. A catalogue and carpet are the signs of the sale. At the end of a long pole there is an unfurled standard emblazoned with all the insignia of the auction room, hammer, rostrum, etc., while the background is filled with the conflicting canvases of Hogarth's "bêtes noires," the Old Masters, which his own works are driving out of the field. The sale took place the last day of the month; the pictures put up were The Harlot's Progress, The Rake's Progress, Morning, Noon, Evening, Night, and The Strolling Players. These masterpieces realised four hundred and twenty-seven pounds seven shillings. Nothing daunted, Hogarth, six years later, tried again with even less success. This time he imagined an original method of conducting the sale, and was ill-advised enough to advertise the total exclusion of his enemies the brokers and dealers. The result might have been foretold. The pictures set up were the inimitable Marriage à la Mode, and for these only one bidder appeared, Mr. Lane, of Hillingdon. The only written offer in the book was for ten pounds, and Mr. Lane said he would make it guineas. He also insisted upon giving some hours' law for the chance of another bidder appearing. As no one came, he carried off the pictures in their fine Carlo Maratti frames which had cost Hogarth four guineas each.

It can hardly be believed that in the face of such a mortifying failure Hogarth should again expose himself to a similar result; but once more he sought humiliation at the hands of a public who were not prone to forgive his satires on their weaknesses. This time

he offered his admirable Election pictures to be raffled for at two guineas a chance. There were to be two hundred chances. Only a small number of his patrons availed themselves of this offer, and when the day of the raffle came, the solitary thrower of the dice appeared in the person of David Garrick. Actor and painter sat looking at one another through a part of the dull afternoon. When no second visitor came, and no message arrived from any of those who had taken tickets, Hogarth's irritation rose to violence; he insisted that as they had not cared either to come or had even asked him to throw for them, Garrick should take his chance. In vain the actor suggested compromise, Hogarth would listen to nothing, and Garrick, like Mr. Lane, carried away his winnings. On his return home, however, he despatched a note to his friend stating that he could not allow himself to possess such works for a mere chance, and that he had placed two hundred pounds in the bank to Hogarth's credit, and that of his heirs. This is the last time we hear of Hogarth trying to dispose of his pictures. The story is a sad one, and fills the reader with honest indignation. It is evidence of the ignorance of the so-called dilettantes of the last century, who slighted the genius who dwelt amongst them, and cast aside his masterpieces to fill their houses with the miserable work of the copyist and the forger, who rifled at their will the pockets of their dupes. Some years later a better spirit began to grow up; it dates from the time that Mr. James Christie, the first member of the now well-known firm, joined the ranks of auctioneers. He was artistic in temperament and honourable in his dealings. The friend of Garrick, Gainsborough, Sheridan, he was not the man to encourage the manufacture of old masters or to give countenance to the Puffs and Carmines. At the same time it is possible that even his keen eye could not always discern the skilful impositions set up as originals. The first home of James Christie was, as is well known, in Pall Mall, at the house where the Royal Academy held their first exhibitions. The rooms were large enough to accommodate both parties. Later on, however, he removed to the west end of Pall Mall, where he remained until 1826, finally settling in the present house occupied by the firm, King Street. A courteous, handsome gentleman, as we see him in Gainsborough's picture, his advent gave a tone to art sales which they never had before, and have

ever since retained. His rooms were always filled not alone with dealers, buyers, and fashionables, but likewise with men who understood what they came to see. They were made welcome if they never offered a bid; while the fact that impositions were excluded, if possible, and only articles of genuine worth and merit admitted, raised the standard and had the most beneficial effect upon public taste, and for this alone the lover of art should feel grateful to the first of the Christies. The catalogues of the house are most interesting reading. They carry us back one hundred and thirty years—all but four. The value of the jewels, pictures, and china which have been sold at Christie's during this number of years would baffle all attempt at calculation. To enumerate all the great collections that have passed under the hammer of the elder Christie would be well-nigh impossible. Among the most famous were those of Pope Paul the Fourth, in 1770, and of Calonne, the French Ambassador, 1795. In the same year came that of Sir Joshua Reynolds, by order of his executors, Malone and Edmund Burke; the great Orleans collection, the sale of Lady Thomond, the Hope, and the Angerstein collection; the Marlborough Gems. The list is endless; there is hardly a title of distinction, from that of George the Fourth, the Royal Dukes, and including the whole peerage, that will not be found in Redford's list of the Art Sales at Messrs. Christie's, or at Mr. Phillips's rooms in New Bond Street.

The humours of sales are instructive. Fashion changes rapidly, and the manias of collectors and fashionable amateurs are evanescent. One time it is blue china, another Derby, or another Staffordshire pottery that rules the day. In this way no one sale is precedent for another, and those who have experience in auctions agree that so far as pictures are in question there are no regular deductions to be drawn with any certainty of prediction. Great judgement must be exercised—judgement which can only be acquired by years of experience, and which even then may be at fault—in choosing the right moment for offering an important picture or collection so as to meet the feeling of the day. Without proper consideration no good prices will be attained. The market fluctuates strangely. In the days of the Regency high prices were given. Lord Hertford—whose great collection passed on to Sir William Wallace—would run up the price of a picture to five thousand pounds. Lord Dudley gave six thousand

pounds for a pair of Sèvres vases which were probably not worth so many hundreds. A story is told of a nobleman who sent his steward to an auction with directions to buy a certain picture. The work was knocked down for a large sum. The steward returned empty-handed, and told his employer that it fetched such an enormous price he thought it better not to purchase it. "Sir," returned the angry peer, "I did not say anything about the price. I told you to buy that picture, and it was your duty to do so if you and your opponent remained bidding until doomsday."

Pictures are often set up for sale and bought in at a high figure by way of feeling the market. This "dodge," if we may so call it, is speedily seen through, and, like most things of the kind, produces in the long run the very effect which is not desired. "The sale audience," Mr. Redford tells us, "especially at Mr. Christie's, have curiously long memories; they never forget the faces of old friends on the walls, but the fact of their being old acquaintances does not increase their value; the result being that the owner has generally to sell at a much lower price. On the other hand, there are occasional strokes of good luck occur, as at the Rushout Sale, when proof copies of Bartolozzi's engravings after Angelica Kaufmann were put up. Mr. Colnaghi whispered to one of the family that they would only fetch a few shillings, but they realised very good prices. On another occasion four of Smirke's Shakesperian pictures were knocked down to a gentleman for the mere price of the canvas. It is not often, however, that such chances occur."

Book sales are perhaps the most interesting of all auctions. It is here the lovers of first editions, Aldines, Elzevirs, and the like congregate. The limits of this paper will not allow of entering on the subject. It is, however, full of interest, and a day at Mr. Sotheby's rooms is never misspent. I hope my readers will one day visit it with me.

IN THE LAND OF NAILS AND CHAINS.

THE other day, in walking from Dudley to Stourbridge, through some of the most picturesquely broken country in England, but from a humanitarian point of view some of the most ugly, I stepped into the "Maypole Inn," by Cradley, and found myself face to face with the late secretary of the

National Amalgamation of Chainmakers' and Chain Strikers' Associations. I was in the heart of the chain and nail district, and I yearned to see something of the industries. Fate could not have brought me cheek by jowl with a better man for my purpose than Mr. Smith.

"Wait ten minutes while I wash my hands and put on a white shirt, and I'll take you to as many workshops as you like between here and Halesowen."

To such an invitation I agreed at once, and in less than ten minutes—for Mr. Smith is a man of his word, as many sweating employers of labour here can testify—my guide and I set out on our quest.

"Things," said Mr. Smith, as we climbed the first of the hills in our way—bordered by pit banks, indifferent brick houses, and with the dirty Stour in the main valley behind us—"are looking bad again for the men. I mean worse than ever," he added, with impressive energy, so that I should not go off with a false impression about former prosperity in the nail and chain trade.

Then, with much strong language, which came from his heart and might therefore be excused, he discussed the lives and manners of the people towards whom he has tried to play a philanthropic part.

"Sooner than exist as they do, I'd drown myself, sir; and rather than bring daughters into the world to put them to chain and nail making, I'd strangle them as soon as they were born."

Hardly had he loosed this terrible sentence from his lips than he said:

"Let's go in here. You will see a lot of them. But it's a well-managed workshop, and they're better off than most."

Through a doorway and we were in a chain factory: a square apartment of good size, lofty, with plenty of windows and ten or twelve forges. To each forge were apportioned a blower and a worker. Hammer, thud, and clatter ruled the roost, and the heat from the forges was considerable, of course, though I stood in the middle of the factory, among the piles of made chains.

The workers looked up, but did not pause for a moment. The iron rods, molten, were fast being thrashed into ovals and welded one within another, and sweat ran from the bodies of the men and lads.

Mr. Smith, for my instruction, put one of the men through a series of questions. He answered cheerfully, but, as it seemed to me, by rote. He was a skilled worker, and by toiling with hands and feet for

nine hours a day could earn something over a sovereign a week.

But I was more struck by the look of the girls in the factory. Bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked, and smiling, these three or four maidens—aged from twelve to fifteen—were a surprise to me. Yet for nine or ten hours daily they work a bellows apiece in close proximity to a fire. One of them was knitting while she treadled. They were grimy, of course. But they were nevertheless an agreeable surprise to me.

Mr. Smith, however, declined to leave me thus contented.

"They won't be like that long," he said. "They'll be turned into the flat chested women-men they all are that work at these cursed forges. They'll marry one of these days, go from church to the chain or nail work, and grind on and on like that for the rest of their lives; and if they bring children into the world they'll set the poor little wretches at work like themselves, and so it'll go on to the end of the chapter. Ignorance doesn't express their state. They are just made to be imposed upon."

With that my friend put his finger on a paragraph in a local paper. Thomas Bagley, chainmaker, had lately made his last chain. He had hanged himself with that chain. He did not think a life of daily hard work for a net earning of five shillings a week worth living. There was also another case: Philemon Baker, nailmaker, aged sixty-one, could earn no more than two shillings and sevenpence halfpenny a week, less one shilling and threepence for rent. And so at length, within a day or two of Thomas Bagley's death, Philemon Baker also hanged himself.

"They are sample cases, that's all," said Mr. Smith.

Then we looked into a large chain works. Anchor and hydraulic lift chains were here being forged; links of the strongest kind. And blows also of the strongest kind were being swung with sledge-hammers on to the red-hot links, in front of the glaring forges.

"It needs a strong 'un, maister, for this 'ere work," said one of the men, as he wiped his dripping face on the soaked sleeve of his shirt.

To me it seemed a nightmarish impossibility that man could go on crashing these tremendous blows on iron from morn till eve; yet it is more or less a fact. But it is a consuming sort of labour; a man's meridian in this line is soon passed.

"Smash!" Ah! that was the steam hammer. It had descended and cut a steel

tram rail clean in two. I suppose some day this chain-beating also will be done mechanically. At present the only difference between the domestic workshops here and the large factories seems to lie in the ability of the latter to sweat the former. A machine-worked bellows to several forges at once must have a pull over a bellows to each forge and a worker to each bellows. Of course, too, in the factories there is close Government inspection, better wage—inasmuch as the middleman, or fogger, is excluded—and shorter, because fixed, hours.

This last point was brought home to me as we entered a nail shop of the most approved primitive type; a hovel about nine feet square, with one forge only, a pointing bench on the one side of the forge, and the hammers on the other.

A lean, middle-aged man was making holdfasts; his daughter was pointing them.

"If you'll believe me," said this man dismally—without cessation of work, mind you—"I've been at it from three in the morning to seven and ten at night—often."

"Oh, then you'll be doing fine," said Mr. Smith, "making your two or three pounds a week, I suppose, eh?"

The man and his daughter smiled a sickly smile apiece.

"Not much," said the former. "Sixteen shillings last week was all we made, and taking off for tools and commissions it come to twelve and eight pence. There's your two or three pounds a week for you, master."

Mr. Smith looked at me elatedly. Here was as good an example of the hardness of the local life as could be found. We had approached the workshop between mixens and the like domestic appurtenances of a necessary but disagreeable kind. It is amid these insanitary surroundings that the father and daughter make nails at starvation wage.

Our next visit was to a house in Gibbet Lane—suggestive name! Here, too, however, I was rather gratified by the cheerfulness of the workers and their philosophy than shocked by the tales told of the iniquitous sweating of the fogger. A drop in prices was impending, said the lean, worn sire as he blew up his tiny forge, after the tea half-hour. But he smiled pleasantly as he said he didn't know how things would go with him in consequence.

"There's worse off than we," he observed.

Father and daughter were here as in the other factory; and there was also a little son, who having been working in a coal

mine from seven to three now came to spend his evenings at spiking, blowing, or what not.

About a pound a week represented the united earnings of this family.

Hence we got into the main road between Birmingham and Hagley, with Shenstone's Leasowes gleaming white among the trees across the valley.

We stopped at a new red cottage, snug to look at, with two or three others close by like it. The houses had been built recently by the resident nailer's sons, who had dug the clay, made the bricks, and erected the cottages without other professional help. It did one good to see such comely evidences of thrift and industry.

The nailer himself turned out at our request and took up his hammer.

"Want to see me knock up a few nails, eh?" he asked, and while he did it he congratulated himself that he had made bricklayers of his sons instead of nailers.

"Why," he exclaimed, "they're getting their eightpence the hour. The Lord on'y knows how many hours I be getting my eightpence."

His cottage interior was bright and well furnished. A ham hung from the ceiling of the living-room, and pictures and nick-nacks abounded. But of course this may all be attributed to co-operation.

One more workshop and I had had enough. This was a long shed with eight or ten forges in it: a worker and a blower to each forge. Toil was being carried on with feverish energy under the eyes of the master, who promenaded up and down. There were as many women as men. The heat was great and the smell baddish, and suggestive of its extreme badness in mid-summer. At one forge, one woman—age about twenty-two—used the hammer with her hands and worked the oliver with her feet. I tried to do as she did. She settled a nail in two or three blows. It cost me seven. The force necessary to make the oliver do its duty is very great. The whole power of the body must be concentrated upon the leg muscles. At one forge a man and wife were at work; both but just over twenty. I wondered what their home life must be after such a day's work. A more jaded couple one could hardly imagine.

That sufficed. From the factory we drove to the railway station, and I wished my friend Mr. Smith "Good-bye."

Lastly, with reference to that curse of the domestic nailers, the fogger or middleman, the words of Mr. Hingley, M.P.,

whose humble local residence we had passed between Cradley and Halesowen, may be quoted:

"The habits of the workpeople themselves contributed largely to the success of the 'fogger' and to their own misery. Working in their own little shops, under no regulation as to hours of starting or leaving, they worked at irregular times, and thus lived in a hand to mouth sort of fashion, which made them an easy prey to the middlemen, who were ready to take advantage of their necessities. With such people no list was recognised. A man who worked in his own little shop could take in more work than he was able to do, and would give some of it out again at a lower price to others. . ."

These poor nailers are thus in the extremely unsatisfactory situation of being almost forced by circumstances and the impossibility of union to conspire for their own degradation. One fails to see how they can be benefited except by their very extinction.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

A STORY FOR THE CHILDREN.

"WELL, I'm very sorry that I don't understand politics," said a Black-beetle one day, as he stood looking at a sign-post forbidding trespassers.

"You understand politics! You don't understand anything—except how to lick the blacking off a pair of boots," said a Grasshopper, who overheard the remark and felt himself in a particularly tantalising mood.

"Well," said the Black-beetle, "there is one thing which I do understand, and which you seem to be quite ignorant of, and that is how to treat a gentleman when I meet one."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Grasshopper. "Come now, I like that; and you call yourself a gentleman, do you?"

"Well, when I was a child——"

"What did you say? Why, you never were a child; you were always a Black-beetle."

"Well, I mean to say when I was young——"

"And that must have been a precious long time since, I should say, judging from your appearance," was the ready retort of the Grasshopper.

One word brought another, and the pair would have come to blows but for the timely appearance of a sweet little Ladybird.

"Gentlemen," she said, "I am quite

ashamed of you. It is most unseemly to conduct yourselves in this manner; but, there, I suppose I must forgive you, as the cause of your disagreement was politics. How do you do, Mr. Grasshopper; won't you introduce me to your friend?" And she smiled at the Beetle, who gazed at her with a would-be fascinating look.

"With pleasure," replied the Grasshopper; and with a stately air he presented the Ladybird to the Beetle.

"You will excuse me leaving, Miss Ladybird," said the Grasshopper; "I have an appointment, and I find I have loitered long enough."

"Quite too long, I should say," said the Beetle to himself.

"But I am going your way, Miss Ladybird," continued the Grasshopper. "May I accompany you?"

"Thanks, Mr. Grasshopper, but I came to invite you to tea. And will your friend come also?—for we shall be quite a political party, and as I heard him remark a few minutes ago that he was sorry he did not understand politics, he will have the opportunity of hearing the views of some of our best politicians."

The Beetle answered for himself, assuring the Ladybird that he should be "most happy."

"You will come at five o'clock, then. We live in a rose-bush, the third from the shrubbery gate. I will look out for you. Until then, adieu," and with a smile the Ladybird trotted off alongside the Grasshopper.

"I did not think you were so kind to strangers and foreigners, Miss Ladybird," the Grasshopper said, in a rather sarcastic tone.

"Indeed?" she replied. "Then you have been doing me a great injustice, for I am particularly kind to strangers;" and she gave her head a toss such as only Ladybirds can give. And the Grasshopper, who was not the least bit dense, knew that the toss meant, "I am my own mistress, and shall be friends with whom I like."

By this time they had reached the rose-bush, so the Grasshopper said good-bye, and Miss Ladybird went home to prepare for her guests.

"Well, my dear," said Miss Ladybird's mother, "you've been a long time away."

"Yes, mother. I happened to overhear Mr. Grasshopper quarrelling with a friend, and——"

"Why, my child, I thought he was the quietest creature imaginable. How you have surprised me!"

"But, mother dear, I reconciled them and invited his friend to join our party this evening. Was that right, mother?"

"Well, my dear, you did it for the best, but it is always very injudicious, not to say unwise, to meddle with other people's affairs and get mixed up with their quarrels."

"But I didn't mix myself up in their quarrel, mother. I just went in the nick of time to stop their quarrel and prevent them from fighting."

"What! do you mean to tell me that Mr. Grasshopper would fight? Why, he must be positively low. But who is his friend?"

"His name is Black-beetle, and he looks black enough. But what is the matter, mother? You look quite frightened!"

"And no wonder, my dear. I am very sorry that you invited this person, for Black-beetles are our enemies; they have been known to eat us up alive. No good ever comes of mixing oneself up in other people's quarrels. Oh, be careful, my child!"

Cautious Mrs. Ladybird was not far off the mark, for as soon as the Grasshopper and his companion were out of sight the Beetle burst out laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he said. "Yes, my sweet little lady, we will come to tea, and shall wait for supper also, and eat up your fair self as a tit-bit."

But, alas! what the Beetle proposes does not always come off. Mr. Beetle's chuckling anticipation was overheard by a Hedgehog, who followed him to his home, which was underneath an old beer-barrel. The Hedgehog listened at the door—I mean by the beer-barrel—and overheard Mr. Black-beetle's plan, which was to gather all his friends and neighbours together and make a bold attack on the rose-bush, third from the shrubbery gate. The Hedgehog waited to hear no more, but went off to consult his wife.

"Well, my dear," she said, for she was a dutiful wife, "I will do my best; but we are only three among a great crowd. Suppose I go and ask Mrs. Hen and her three daughters, to assist us."

"A splendid plan, my dear. Why, what a good head you have got, to be sure!"

Shortly after five o'clock a dark procession of Black-beetles might have been seen cautiously creeping along the side of the shrubbery and hiding themselves all round about the rose-bush, third from the shrubbery gate. A little behind them came Mr. and Mrs. Hedgehog and their

son; and behind them again Mrs. Hen and her daughters. "Not a sound was heard," but young Mr. Hedgehog, who was on the watch because his sight was better than his father's, gave the signal only just in time, for the rose-bush was being besieged by the Beetle's numerous friends, and its occupants were screaming for aid. Then what a dash was made by Mrs. Hen and her daughters and the Hedgehogs! They pecked and pecked until not one Black-beetle remained. But the poor little Ladybird in her fright flew away and quietly hid herself in the very heart of a beautiful rose.

Presently she felt a sudden jerk and peeped out. The rose in which she was hiding was in a basket with some other flowers which were being carried along in a young lady's hand. Another jerk and another peep, and Miss Ladybird hidden in the rose was adorning a dinner-table. Soon the company sat down to dinner, and conversation began. Here little Miss Ladybird heard more about politics in one hour than she had heard all her life in the rose-bush. Dinner came to an end, but Miss Ladybird's troubles were not over. Another jerk, and after a while when she peeped out she saw the rose in which she was concealed adorning a lady's hair. Soon she felt almost choked for want of air, and there was such a buzzing noise and a babel of tongues. She must peep again; she did so, and to her astonishment she saw a little House-fly walking up the lady's hair and coming towards her. She crept back again among the rose petals, intending not to make friends with this stranger after the consequences resulting from making friends with the Beetle. But the Fly came very close, and she could not help saying "Oh!"

Whereupon the Fly said:

"I beg your pardon, miss; I am sorry if I intrude."

At the sound of his friendly voice the poor little thing said:

"Please don't go, I'm in such trouble. I am far away from home, and I don't know where I am."

"You don't know where you are? Why, you are in the theatre. Just peep out and see the people and the lights and things. It's just beautiful. I do enjoy myself here."

She peeped again and saw row upon row of faces all happy-looking, and almost every dress was adorned with flowers.

"I wonder if there are any prisoners in those flowers," she said, "and if they are as miserable as I am?"

"Miserable!" said the Fly. "Are you miserable? Is it possible that any one could be miserable here, with all these lovely faces and splendid lights? Why, I can walk up any of these faces if I like, and, do you know, I have such fun sometimes I alight upon the glass of an opera-glass just as a gentleman lifts it to see a lady through it; he takes his handkerchief to dust the glass and I pop off, only to pop on again when he wants to see her. And do you see that gentleman down there in the stalls with a bald head? Well, I've just been having the most beautiful slides imaginable on his pate. He doesn't like it, but I do. But you look tired; let me go and bring you some chocolate cream. I won't be a minute. See, a young lady in the stalls has got a box full. I'll go and get you a bit."

"Oh, no, thanks, I won't trouble you. Besides, you mustn't steal."

"Steal! Why, good gracious! There's more than all of us could eat in a hundred years at the refreshment buffet. Won't you come and have something?"

"No, thank you, I won't come. I think it is very bad of you to torment people in the manner you do."

"Oh! I haven't told you half yet. Look at that bald-headed old man in the orchestra; he is the best violinist here. Well, we do love to torment him. When he is fiddling in some particular piece, I and a few friends take that opportunity to go for slides, and he can't leave off to get at us, and we have a splendid time."

"Well, I call that positively cruel," said Miss Ladybird.

"I call it good fun," replied Mr. Fly.

"Well, I don't."

"Oh, you're a silly little thing. I can't be bothered with you," and the Fly went off buzzing.

"Oh! what must I do?" little Ladybird said to herself. "I do wish I was back in the rose-bush with mother. I'm very sure I won't invite any more gentlemen to our house."

Another jerk, and she crept back to her hiding-place; when she peeped out again she was not in the lady's hair; she was in a gentleman's buttonhole. The gentleman held the lady's hand lovingly, and the lady looked confidingly into his face. But people were bustling about, and the Ladybird crept back again. Another jerk, and another peep; the rose she was in was pressed to the gentleman's lips. She was out in the air again.

"Oh, I must escape," she said, and made a bold effort. She was free, and upon looking round found she was near her own garden; and after a very little wandering she found her mother. But on the following morning they left the rose-bush, third from the shrubbery gate, and took a house which was to let in the crack of a gate-post.

"It is the safest place for us," said Mrs. Ladybird. "Now we shall have no trouble and upset of removing in winter."

A SUNDAY AT ARCACHON.

ARCACHON, like other fashionable French bathing-places, is great fun to the contemplative Briton on tour. No doubt our own seaside resorts present their droll side to the observant foreigner. They do that even to the Englishman, though of course in a dulled degree, due to their familiarity. But I fancy there is, upon the whole, more humour at a French watering-place.

We ran down to Arcachon for a first visit one Sunday in September. That is quite the thing to do if you want to see the place at its liveliest. We had inklings of the truth thereof in the Bordeaux railway station. There was a wild, frenzied, screaming horde of fathers and mothers, and children in sun-bonnets and armed with spades and pails—all struggling at the ticket-office and ejaculating "Mon Dieu!" at the top of their voices. We Britons may take our pleasures sadly, but it is a deal better so than in the French mode, which includes the extremes of distressful agitation and of emotional bliss in its comprehensive compass.

A very large lady trod hard on my toes at the ticket place. I exclaimed in anguish. She, on her part, started at my exclamation, and trod on my toes again. It was frightful. I reckoned her weight at eighteen stone. This is no exaggeration, for these southerners of the Gironde district develop bulk in an incredible manner. We found a certain coarse diversion in guessing at the girth of a few of the ladies. One to whom we ascribed a circumference of nine feet at the hips was not, I declare on my honour, at all wronged by our estimate of her. It was a sight to tickle a cynic to see her fly at a relative on the Arcachon station platform and clasp him—a small, shrinking man—to her alarming bosom. He came forth from the sweet ordeal crushed and gasping. There were others enough like her. They

are quite as much characteristics of the country as are the stretches of level pine forest, with gay heather under the trees and sandy soil, through which we passed on our slow way to the holiday town.

Dismal are some of the trains down here. One day we spent an impatient two hours and a half in covering the thirty-five miles between Bordeaux and Arcachon. It was a melting day, too—an experience that made us long for the embrace of a dear Scotch mist. Our fellow-travellers all bore inflamed faces beaded with moisture. And the engine obligingly bred smuts and coal-dust which were drawn to our faces as irresistibly as steel to a magnet.

Worse still are the journeys in the Landes—north and south of Arcachon—where towns are not, and where the infrequent villages are buried among the pines and sand, with spacious, still, gleaming lakes here and there between them. The trains have every encouragement to go fast in such a district. There is nothing in the nature of a steep gradient. Yet they are satisfied with a speed of from eight to twelve miles an hour.

I asked a well-informed native gentleman how this was justified.

"'Mais,' my dear sir," he retorted, as if pricked with pain by my implied protest against his country's institutions, "there are cows. Do you not hear the bells on their necks?"

It is true. They do allow belled kine to roam as they please in the forests—gentle white and black and cream-coloured little beasts. But it seemed to me monstrous that the quadrupeds should not be taught the great lesson of responsibility.

"Does it then happen," I enquired, "that a cow ever receives a blow from one of your trains that may, by extraordinary hazard, prove fatal—to the cow?"

The gentleman used a vigorous apostrophe, and added: "Mon Dieu! Oui. It happens."

For my part, I shouldn't have thought it possible.

But to return. When you have run for a pleasant hour through pine forests, with pink heather and sunny broom on the shaded sward, you ought to be at the head of the large inland bay which is Arcachon's chief feature.

It is a horrid sort of bay at low tide, for though fifty miles in circumference it is very shallow except in channels. The consequence is that the sea's recession leaves miles upon miles of nasty mud which, though first-rate for oysters—so it is reported, at

least—is not good for Christian nostrils. Yet there are houses thickly on the edge of the mud, and on long embankments built out into the bay. These last, however, are mainly concerned with the great local industries: oysters and sardines. And verily, though offensive, this stink of sun-baked mud cannot be very insalubrious, for the natives have an air of health that it does one good to observe.

Turned loose at length in Arcachon's red railway station, we were at once beset by the numerous itinerant vendors of things who assemble at all popular resorts. We had not pushed our way twenty paces down the plane-shaded avenue townwards ere we had our hands full of cards, inviting us to dine at a score of different places at so much or so little a head. And on all these cards the famous Arcachon oysters were vaunted—as a supreme attraction. In the little booths by our side, too, were mahogany-hued folks, aproned and smiling, with tubs of oysters before them. I hope I may trust my memory when I avow that for a franc a man might eat fifty of the bivalves, and still leave a good profit to his host.

Thus we came to the summer town's main street, a long pleasant thoroughfare trending parallel to the shore. Here was life enough, with a vengeance. Thousands of excursionists had preceded us this day. They were breakfasting in leafy arbours, in shaded courtyards, and in the large balcony rooms of the hotels. They were strolling provisionally up and down, like ourselves, uttering ejaculations, looking in the shop-windows, or reprimanding their errant offspring. They were riding on horseback or driving in chaises; or they were cycling, with heroic indifference to the crowd. A handsome blonde girl, in fawn-coloured uniform, wasp-like waist, and extremely bagged knickerbockers, flashed by on her machine without exciting more adverse comment than the cry, "How chic!" from several admiring—and probably envious—damsels of her own age. There was great cracking of whips from drivers, a resonant babble of voices, and the sharp clink of glasses in the adjacent cafés and plates in the restaurants.

But one sound we missed: the invigorating roar of protesting waves as they broke upon a shingly shore.

And yet we were close to Arcachon's beach, all the while. Of this we had petrifying admonition ere long. We were still in this main lung of the place, when a well-built gentleman in black and white

woollen pyjamas—and nothing else—which came no lower than mid-thigh, crossed the road in company with a pretty girl whose bathing dress was suggested rather than concealed by the loose over-robe she wore. They had both evidently come straight from the water—and were far from ashamed. I'm sure I don't know why they should have been ashamed; yet an English girl fresh from a bath would have died, I feel sure, rather than crossed, say, Piccadilly Circus in such a garb. But this girl was French, and had charming little feet—which makes all the difference.

Having thus got our clue to the shore, we diverged thither, and in a moment or two beheld a scene like Margate's and Rhyll's any fine August day. Like, yet with added features. The tide was on the ebb. Hundreds of boats were close in-shore or stranded, and between and among them hundreds of men and women and boys and girls were bathing indiscriminately. Others were running about or strolling towards their dressing-rooms, unconscious of the crowds of clothed pedestrians through which they had to make their way.

Mothers and fathers by the score had camped out on the soft sand, rigged up little screens against the sun, and disposed themselves for calm spectacular happiness in the midst of their eager, bare-legged children. They were eating, drinking, or smoking, or methodically inhaling what they perchance believed to be pure undefiled ozone. As a picture, it was good; and not altogether commonplace.

Arcachon's chief hotels are built with large dining-rooms abutting on Arcachon's sands. This is convenient and gay. We breakfasted thus at the "Richelieu," with a harpist trilling melodies in our midst. Lounging and bathing mortals on the yellow sands were our foreground; beyond was the radiant shrinking water, with staked islets momentarily uncovering themselves here and there in the Bay; and on all sides of the enclosed water space black pines made a solemn but far from depressing girdle.

We enjoyed a tolerable breakfast, and the society of fellow-guests some of whom were very entertaining. It is the vogue here for the ladies to wear bonnets of the kind Millais gives his little two-year-old children on canvas. The effect is in some cases winsome; in others grotesque. But I shall not soon forget the impression made upon me by a certain young wife with large blue eyes in such a headgear. She came in to breakfast still damp from

her bath, and looking as if Neptune had done her good. With her was her husband, a tall, debilitated young man. They did not appear well matched, these two. There was a certain look of contempt for her spouse in the young wife's steady blue eyes; nor did they interchange more than a word or two during the meal. Yet I dare say theirs was a commonplace history enough. It has its counterpart in England also—though more seldom, and with, as a rule, more regard for appearances.

Other ladies in these babies' bonnets proved gruesome delusions. Seen from behind—their heads totally concealed—they were, perhaps, seducing; but when you came cheek by jowl with them, they were old, or more than middle-aged, with, like as not, undisguised powder on their heated faces.

What struck us most here—for we were innocent Britons, with British prudery fast rooted in our prejudiced breasts—was the shameless way in which the ladies, or at least the women, bared their legs to paddle in the fringe of Arcachon Bay's little dribbling waves. It was a spectacle to appal some of our country people; but it was taken quite as a matter of course at Arcachon.

Can you conceive anything more ludicrous in its way than a demure spectaclled matron of fifty with her clothes pinned up like a child's, attended by a portly husband, likewise barelegged, and all their children—rather more than barelegged—thus dabbling in the water; ever and anon uttering little squeals as they tread on a shell or a crab's leg, and ever and anon stooping to fish forth some trivial wonder from beneath the translucent surface of the water?

There were several amateur photographers on the beach. A more curious array of subjects they could not have had. But, as a matter of fact, they made their pictures without smiling. There was nothing abnormal in the scenes; they were just vignettes of French watering-place life, that is all.

The sun was mighty hot on these honey-combed sands—broken into holes for the repose of family parties—and we at length turned our backs upon them. Besides, really, to tell the truth, I did not feel at all sure about the sanitary condition of this people's playground. There were interjacent patches of black ooze about the sand which both looked and smelt alarmingly like drainage matter come to light from below, as if it were more interested in overhead life than the pipes that were—let us surmise—constructed specially to

carry it into the feeding-ground of the oysters. And so we traversed the town again, and made for the cool territory of the pines.

Ah, those pines! They are the true glory of Arcachon. Without them it would be an unsatisfactory sort of place; with them it is dignified and made romantic to boot.

There is the seaside Arcachon and the woodland Arcachon. The one is the summer town, and the other the winter health resort.

In the summer town you live and move and have your hot being in hotels, unless you are a rich wine-merchant or a successful financier, and can afford one of the very few exquisite little villas which compete with the big hotels for a sea front. These are altogether lovely, vying almost with the residences on Riviera for attractiveness. One we saw which we envied much. It was of red brick with dainty turrets, having well-grown trees in its little garden, glass-houses, and an especially snug seat with bear-skins spread over it. A graceful stone balcony with a bower at one corner formed its boundary on the seaward side, and private steps gave its happy inmates private access to the water at all states of the tide. But there were not many like it.

In the forest, however, there is no town; only a congeries of chalets set at random on the sand, with the dark green pines round them like pins on a pin-cushion. The atmosphere is turpentine, and therefore good; and there is excellent shade from the ardent southern sun.

The chalets here are named like one's own babies. We saw the names Henrietta, Theresa, James, Alphonse, Jasmin, Mary, and so forth. Bright little residences they are, too, with their red tiles and varnished woodwork; bijou as bijou can be. Environ them with the light-coloured sand, the green of the woods, and the blue of the Arcachon sky, and you have an idea of the kaleidoscopic beauty of the place.

Here, too, is the Casino, a garish scarlet and yellow concern in the Moorish style. It was shut in September, but its terrace was accessible, and the view therefrom, if not as dazzling as that from the Monte Carlo gardens, was yet exhilarating. It was, at any rate, better than the view of the Casino itself, which made me think of a fantastically congealed clot of blood, monstrously magnified. Yet it were unfair to hint even at any real deadliness in this red and yellow construction. Though they gamble a little here as in all Continental

Casinos, I don't know that any man has ever cut his throat or shot or hanged himself at Arcachon as a sequel to his money losses.

One of the most piquant of our little glimpses of "bourgeois" life here at Arcachon was due to the Observatory, a view point near the Casino. We were drinking lager beer at fivepence the glass under the trees, when two weary women came up with three small children, tear-stained, and evidently on their part also oppressed by the pain of too much pleasuring at a bout. The sight of the Observatory staircase—a corkscrew—at once raised the spirits of the youngsters and correspondingly stirred the anxieties of the ladies.

There was a wordy debate as to the advisability of allowing the eldest daughter to ascend such a staircase. The damsel was about ten. She bullied her relatives into giving their consent, and sprang off gleefully. Then uprose a tempest of wails from the other children—a miss of seven and a boy of eight. The latter developed temper, and, removing from his family circle, sat apart on the end of a form, which instantly tilted and turned him head over heels in the neatest manner in the world.

We smoked and drank, and contemplated—with masculine hard-heartedness—the scene that then ensued. Having such excellent added pretext for wailing, the boy made the welkin ring. They searched his head for bruises, but found none. Nevertheless he made the woods echo, and was bandaged with all the pocket-handkerchiefs available. And the little miss also, with one finger in her mouth, bellowed exceedingly while she followed with longing eyes the diminishing form of her sister up above.

"Mais, mam'selle," cried one of the harassed women at length, turning upon the infant in a pet, "c'est impossible, parfaitement impossible, pour vous à faire la girandole comme ça!"

The error of logic was, however, evident to the little lass, and she continued her wails. We left them still wailing.

It were a mistake to leave Arcachon without eating some of its oysters. We made a light, unorthodox repast off a couple of dozen of them—at a halfpenny each—somewhere about four o'clock. They do not, for all their fame, compare favourably with our dear friends of Whitstable—to which, indeed, they are pigmies. But, considering all things—their foreign origin among other reasons; for one must be prejudiced—they are not to be scorned.

Returning from the railway station in the evening was like being in the crowd of a Lord Mayor's Day. Such an unmannerly hustling for places, such beseeching, and—I am sorry to add—such strong language! But there must be some drawback to an excursion of this kind, else its more enjoyable parts would lose some of the charm they get from mere contrast.

The sun went down behind the forest while yet we were among the trees. It was the colour of a blood orange, and it left long crimson and amber streamers trailing athwart the pale turquoise empyrean for many minutes afterwards.

RICHENDA.

BY MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "The Thirteenth Brydaine," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "The Vicar's Aunt," etc. etc.

CHAPTER XV.

"SIR RODERICK GRAEME."

While his name was thus announced in stentorian tones by a manservant, Sir Roderick stood on the threshold and glanced hither and thither into the room before him in search of his hostess. It was a large drawing-room, and it was brilliantly lighted with electric light. The light was saved from being too glaring by soft shades of a pale green which harmonised well with the darker green of the wall decoration. And this last made a good background for the groups of figures moving about the room; figures of men in well-appointed evening dress, and of women in every possible variety of what they themselves would have called "smart gowns." Stands of flowers and ferns were arranged here and there along the walls, and they softened the contrasting colours of the dresses, and broke the straight outlines of the room.

It was a really pretty scene; prettier, indeed, than most evening parties, because everything was so well arranged for producing a good effect. But Sir Roderick Graeme gave neither look nor thought to the scene itself. He only scanned it to discover the one person who was not, it seemed, discoverable at the moment—his hostess. She was not in her conventional place at the entrance of the room. Her guest had arrived very late, which accounted for this, but it did not account for her non-appearance now.

Sir Roderick was just wondering what course he should take, when suddenly,

from a group on his left hand, a figure disengaged itself and came towards him. Sir Roderick's eyes fell upon it, and he gave a little start. It was the figure of a slight, graceful woman. She was dressed in pink silk, with some soft stuff about it of a pale blue. Pink was the colour of the season, and this dress was the most fashionable shade of pink; its cut had already made half the women in the room envious and dissatisfied because their own dresses were not also French. Her soft brown hair was dressed very elaborately and fastened with a diamond star; a diamond pendant rose and fell on her beautiful white neck. Her cheeks were glowing with a soft colour which put the paint on many faces in the room to shame, and as she came towards Sir Roderick her large eyes sparkled almost as brilliantly as her diamonds.

"I thought you were going to treat me as you've treated me hitherto," she said, in a soft but excited voice. "I'd given you up, Sir Roderick, as a matter of fact; and that's why I didn't hear your name. I shouldn't have heard it now if Mr. Kennaway hadn't told me that you were looking for me."

"I've been in Scotland," he said, by way of answer to the first part of her address. "I'm awfully sorry," he added, as response to the second.

"I know you've been in Scotland," she said, laughing lightly. "You sent all your answers to my invitations from thence. But what I ask is, why stay there all this time? In this fearful weather, too!"

She gave a little affected shiver which nearly brought her pretty shoulders out of her dress, and which was certainly unnecessary. No cold breath from the January snow which sprinkled the street outside had found, or could find, its way into those well-warmed rooms. Sir Roderick did not seem to hear what was being said to him. He was gazing, almost staring, at the small, brilliant figure before him; and the look that was growing clearer and clearer was a look of perplexed amaze.

"Have you looked enough at my frock?"

Sir Roderick started, and stammered an incoherent word or two of apology. His hostess laughed.

"There's no need to apologise!" she said lightly. "I hope you like it. I like it myself. I think it very chic." She paused for an instant and looked up at him. "Now," she said, "I've given you no less than three distinct leads, Sir

Roderick, and you haven't risen to the occasion with one single compliment! I suppose this is what comes of vegetating in Scotland."

Sir Roderick looked at the radiant figure before him, and hesitated. He seemed to be looking for words.

But the necessity for words was suddenly taken away. The pretty pink-draped figure turned, sharply, as if in response to a summons from behind.

"Yes?" she said interrogatively.

Just behind her stood a man who nodded carelessly to Sir Roderick. It was Fergus Kennaway.

"I want to introduce Cameron to you, Miss Leicester," he said. "You'll come with-me?"

With a little smile to Sir Roderick, Miss Leicester turned away at once, and swept away into the moving groups, at Fergus Kennaway's side.

Sir Roderick was left standing alone; he looked like a sort of human rock in the middle of the light, and chatter, and movement around him; for he made no attempt to move away from the place where Miss Leicester had left him. He stared, with blank amaze in his look, over the heads of the people at the vanishing pink-draped figure. Some one brushed against him and begged his pardon, and then Sir Roderick became aware that he was very much in the way in his present position. He gave an odd sort of gasp, and retreated to a wall, where he leaned back, his eyes fixed, it seemed, on space. He made no effort to make conversation, or even to discover any acquaintances. He just simply stood silent and motionless, watching the roomful as if it had been a theatre and he the spectator at a play. Quite unconsciously he gave a sigh; a rather heavy one.

"I say," said a cheerful voice at his side, "can I do anything for you?"

Sir Roderick, innocently unaware of what had given rise to these words, looked round with some astonishment.

"I beg your pardon?" he said questioningly.

Beside him was a boy whose age might have been about seventeen. He was tall, and possessed the rather overgrown look common with tall boys, and his faultless evening dress seemed to set a trifle uneasily on him. He had a rather pale face, much freckled, and good-humoured, very intelligent eyes.

"Oh, I thought you seemed bored," he

explained frankly; "and I might perhaps introduce you to somebody or do something. Richie said I was to look after the people all I could. I'm Jack Leicester," he added.

Sir Roderick turned abruptly and held out his hand.

"Oh!" he said. "I know your sister."

"I know you do. I saw you talking to her just as Kennaway——" the pale face darkened heavily and suddenly—"walked her off. Don't you hate all this sort of thing?" he demanded abruptly.

"What sort of thing?"

"Oh, parties! They are the most fearful rot, to my mind. I suppose women like them, though. Richie's mad on them. I'm sure I wish she wouldn't be. We've seen so little of her."

"You are living with Miss Leicester?"

"Of course. Look here, what do you think of some supper? I see some people going down. And I must go and find a girl or some one. You just come after me."

Mechanically Sir Roderick moved, and as his cheery escort made his way through the people towards the doorway, he followed him equally mechanically.

"Sir Roderick!"

He had not reached the head of the staircase when the exclamation arrested him. The voice that spoke was loud and high-pitched, and the owner was very much over-dressed. He turned and shook hands with Mrs. Fitzgerald. Jack Leicester, who had gone a few steps down the staircase, turned to his new friend with an almost imperceptible nod, by which he meant to arrange that Sir Roderick should bring Mrs. Fitzgerald down. Sir Roderick, however, had already arranged matters in his own mind. He proposed himself to Mrs. Fitzgerald as her escort, and was accepted.

They squeezed slowly down the crowded stair in silence; speaking was out of the question during the process. It was not until Sir Roderick had established her comfortably at a little table, and found for her the special viands she requested, that Mrs. Fitzgerald was prepared to enter into any conversation. But these preliminaries being over, she was evidently prepared for a great deal.

"Isn't this absolutely ridiculous?" she said, as Sir Roderick placed himself opposite to her at the little round table.

"Isn't what ridiculous?" he said absently.

"That you and I should meet each other

in the house of this girl? That I should accept hospitality from a young woman who has been my paid servant? It's absurd, you know; utterly absurd! But what can one do when every one does it?"

"Miss Leicester is popular, then?"

"Popular! Why, where in the world—— Oh, I remember, you've been dawdling in Scotland, so you have! She got into society with a rush that takes my breath away. Horrid, scheming girl!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald moderated her voice so very slightly that Sir Roderick glanced around him in some alarm. Mrs. Fitzgerald caught the glance and laughed loudly.

"Don't be afraid," she said. "I'll take the responsibility of my words if they're heard. She knows I can't endure her. I suppose this is the first time you have been here, then?"

"Yes, it is."

"You're very monosyllabic!" Mrs. Fitzgerald looked up from her plate quickly, as if a sudden thought had struck her. "You weren't taken with the heiress when she was my pretty nurse, were you? Don't tell me that she's made a fool of you as she has of Kennaway."

Mrs. Fitzgerald's voice was harsher than ever; from her small eyes shot a quick gleam, and her lips moved as with a spasm of uncontrollable feeling. But she repressed the signs before Sir Roderick could possibly have observed them.

"Kennaway?" Sir Roderick spoke quickly. "Are they—is she——"

"They're not engaged—yet," said Mrs. Fitzgerald, "but they've both made good use of their time since she came to live in the world, and every one expects it daily, now."

"But——"

Sir Roderick did not seem able to get on with his sentence. He ended it by biting hard at his moustache.

"I do assure you that, where Miss Leicester is concerned, there seem to be no buts," said Mrs. Fitzgerald. "She gives him the most open encouragement, and has done all along. I shall always believe she meant to catch him when she was with me—always. Scheming to the finger-tips, as I say. I've not told you now, that I am certain she put the paragraph in the papers herself."

"What paragraph?"

Sir Roderick was playing idly with a fork as he spoke. But his supper lay untasted on his plate.

"I'm sure she is capable of it, at any

rate," went on Mrs. Fitzgerald, in an aggressively defiant tone.

She had either not heard Sir Roderick's question at all, or she was too engrossed in her subject to pause to answer it.

"She's capable of anything! Do you know, she has no chaperon to speak of—that is to say, only a middle-aged nonentity who scarcely ever shows herself. She's nowhere visible to-night, for instance; that is, I've not seen her, and I call it most forward of Miss Leicester to receive every one unsupported. But——"

"What is the paragraph you spoke of?"

Sir Roderick's question was repeated in a rather insistent tone. Perhaps Mrs. Fitzgerald noticed that fact, perhaps she suddenly remembered that he had asked it before. At any rate, she overlooked his interruption, and answered him forthwith.

"Oh, an idiotic paragraph that went the round of all the smart papers," she said. "'A young lady's startling change of position,' and so forth. They all called her a governess. I suppose nurse would have sounded incredible. It's in life that the incredible things happen, you see. People got interested, of course; they're all fools; and no sooner had she taken a good house than she was overwhelmed with callers. And goodness only knows who hasn't taken the girl up!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald let the spoon which she had been using fall with a clatter on her plate, and rose from the table with an impatient gesture.

"Come and help me forget the whole idiotic affair," she said, in an irritated voice. "It exasperates me at times more than I can bear. Come and tell me when you can lunch with me. And tell me why you have been secluding yourself such ages in Scotland. It's horribly unsociable of you, I do think."

Mrs. Fitzgerald had spoken the last few words over her shoulder to Sir Roderick, who was following her out of the supper-room to the foot of the stairs. He could not have answered her during their ascent of them, however much he might have wished to do so. For a crush of people separated them temporarily, and obliterated his view of Mrs. Fitzgerald's glittering green and silver brocade dress. He could not rejoin her until they had reached the head of the stairs. As he did so they were exactly opposite the door leading into the drawing-room. It was only separated from them by the breadth of the narrow landing. Just inside the doorway, with the dark

outlines of the door-frame making a piquant setting for her brilliant face and pink-draped figure, was their hostess, Richenda Leicester. Beside her, evidently about to take her down to supper, was Fergus Kennaway. His dark face was full of a sort of careless triumph. Hers, radiant, flushed, and excited, was triumphant also. She slipped her hand into Fergus Kennaway's arm as she caught sight of Mrs. Fitzgerald, and as they passed the other two she smiled excitedly.

"Hateful minx!" ejaculated Mrs. Fitzgerald, as she sank into a seat. "I should like to shake her!"

Sir Roderick's eyes were round and boyish in their wondering gaze; but his face was a trifle pale, and he said something under his breath—something which Mrs. Fitzgerald did not hear. The next instant he had flung himself on the seat beside her.

"How are Veronica and the others?" he said to her in a brisk, changed voice.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was several hours later; well on, in fact, into the small hours of the morning. All Miss Leicester's guests were gone; the front door had just closed behind the last, and the tired servants were fastening it with a little clattering noise. Miss Leicester herself stood on the landing outside the drawing-room door. Her eyes still sparkled brightly, and her face was still slightly flushed. Beside, with his arm thrown caressingly round her waist, was the pale-faced boy who had introduced himself to Sir Roderick as Jack Leicester. He was playing with her pretty hair with his other hand carelessly enough, but the intelligent eyes were scanning her face at the same time a trifle doubtfully.

"Don't, Jacky dear!" she said. "My hair will be so muddled!"

"I like it best muddled," was the cool response; "and there's no one else to see it just now, Richie dear, so I shall do as I choose."

"It's time you went to bed," she said, finding that protest was to avail her nothing.

"What about you?" the boy answered, laughing. "Isn't it time you went, too?"

"I think I'll wait until the servants have shut up," she said, rather wearily.

"All right; so you shall. But I see no reason why you should wait here in this identical spot! Come and sit over the smoking-room fire for a bit. It's jolly

warm in there; I saw to that. Come, and we'll have a private brew of mulled claret, or something, together. Come, there's a dear girl!"

He had unloosed his hold from her waist, and slipped his hand into her arm, and he tried gently, as he spoke, to draw her along the landing towards the room in question. She resisted, however.

"I must go and kiss the twins first, then," she said, disengaging her arm from his hand. "I promised them to go the instant moment the people were gone——"

"They're sound asleep," objected Jack.

"I hope and trust they are; but I should feel horrid if I broke my promise to them. I'll come back to you, if you like, I really will, if you'll let me go now."

"Honour bright?" he said reluctantly.

She nodded, smiling, and he released her. While he sauntered along the landing towards the smoking room, Miss Leicester turned, picked up the skirt of the pink dress, and ran quickly and lightly up a short flight of stairs. On the landing above, she paused for a moment; whatever she might have been thinking of drove from her pretty eyes all their sparkling light, leaving them soft, deep, and tender. She opened very softly a door on her right, and entered a large bedroom, lit only by the dimmest gaslight. It was simply, but very comfortably furnished. Every one of its fittings, from its wall-paper to the two narrow brass bedsteads that stood side by side in the middle of one wall, was the best possible thing of its kind. The tastes of the owners of the room were made evident in several different ways. Over one brass bedstead was a collection of photographs, taken in every possible attitude, of a Scotch terrier, who was himself reposing peacefully at the foot of the bed. Near the other, on a chest of drawers, were a quantity of small models, in cork and wood, of ships of every size and grade; while a highly-coloured picture of a man-of-war was pinned to the wall above. On a low shelf just inside the door were grouped two cages of canaries, and a glass-covered box full of silkworms, together with several closed and more mysterious receptacles.

Miss Leicester caught the pretty pink dress lightly round her, so that it might not rustle, and moved gently up the passage between the two brass bedsteads. Her eyes grew softer and more loving still, and a very sweet little smile curved her pretty mouth. She bent down gently over one bed, and smoothed back the ruffled hair of

its occupant, a boy of thirteen, from his forehead, and then very softly and gently she pressed on the forehead a long, loving kiss.

"Good night, Richie darling," murmured the boy. At the murmur, the other sleeper turned in his bed.

"You said you'd come," he muttered sleepily, "but you haven't kissed me."

"I'm going to, Bob dear." Miss Leicester was tucking the bed-clothes of the other bed carefully in as she spoke. When she had finished she turned to the second, and gave to the second boy just the same loving touch and caress she had given the first. He opened his eyes. "You've kept your promise, ducky!" he said gratefully, and he was asleep again before Miss Leicester's hand had left his hair. She tucked him up carefully, also, and then, with a smile that was at once protecting and tender, she caught up her dress again, and made her way on tip-toe out of the room, closing the door softly behind her.

She ran down the short flight of stairs, hurried along the landing, and opened the door of the smoking-room. It was a square room, not large, with a fireplace cutting off one corner, which gave it an unusual and comfortable look. By the fireplace, in a low basket-chair, Jack had established himself to wait for his sister. He rose at her entrance, and pulled forward for her a corresponding chair to his own.

"Here you are," he said cheerily. "That's right. We'll be as jolly as possible! Tired?" he added questioningly, as Miss Leicester sank down among the soft cushions rather slowly.

"No!" she said briskly. "I'm not tired. Parties never tire me. I love seeing people. I could set out for some one else's house now this minute, to another."

Jack gave a low whistle of dismay at the idea.

"Rather you than me!" he said emphatically. "But I'm awfully glad, since you like to, that you can have parties and go to them, Richie."

Miss Leicester was lying back at full length in her chair, her small feet in their pretty pink shoes just resting on the bright steel bar of the fender. She stretched up her arms and put her hands behind her head as her brother ended.

"So am I!" she said, with a contented sigh. But she said no more, and a silence fell between the brother and sister.

Jack had also stretched himself comfort-

ably in his chair. His arms were folded, and his keen eyes were fixed on the clear little fire in the grate. His sister's eyes were also fixed on the fire. But though to a casual observer they might seem to be obviously in unison, in reality the trains of thought which they were respectively pursuing were as far apart as possible.

Under the influence of her thoughts, the woman's cheeks glowed deeper and deeper, and her eyes grew strangely bright and excited; and she seemed to grow absolutely motionless as the minutes crept by so fixed was her pose.

The boy's face, meantime, betrayed the fact that his thoughts were by no means pleasant to him; for the good-humoured eyes were very cloudy and anxious, and lines of frowning consideration had marked themselves on his brow. He did not imitate his sister's motionless pose. He moved constantly, first crossing and then uncrossing his legs restlessly, while one of his hands was clasping and unclasping the arm of his chair. It was evident that he was irresolute and undecided; and from the way in which he glanced once or twice at his sister's pretty, silent form, it was further evident that the indecision in question was connected with her.

At last he pulled himself straight up in his chair, suddenly, and looked at his sister.

"Richie!" he said. "I say, Richie!"

Miss Leicester started and turned absently to her brother.

"Yes," she said vaguely. "Yes. What is it, Jack?"

The boy leaned over from his chair and took gentle hold of one of the pretty ringed hands that lay on his sister's lap. Something in the gesture and the boy's manner surprised her, evidently. She, too, drew herself up in her chair.

"Well, foolish boy," she said, "what do you want?"

"Richie"—the boy's manner was uncertain and almost diffident, yet beneath it there was an odd purposefulness that gave it something like dignity—"I've wanted to ask you something for a long time, and I've never seemed to get at you in peace. I'm afraid you won't much like it, but I must ask it. I want to know—I want you to tell me, if you have any definite intention in letting Mr. Kennaway monopolise you and hang about you as he does, and has done for weeks."

Miss Leicester was alert and attentive enough now. She had drawn her hand away from her brother, and was using both apparently to screen her face from the fire. But they also partly screened it from him.

"What do you mean, Jack?" she said. "Why do you want to know?"

"I do want to know," was the answer. "If you are angry I can't help it. Only tell me, Richie, do you like him as much as he thinks you do?"

Miss Leicester rose abruptly, kissed the top of her brother's head, and walked to the door.

"Perhaps I do and perhaps I don't," she said mockingly. "I'm going to bed, Jacky. Good night, dear boy."

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HOME NOTES

AND
ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

STAINS ON CLOTHING.—A careful housewife would not send clothes to the wash without first examining them to see that there are no stains, for she well knows that once the stain is placed in hot soda-water it is a fixture, and difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate. Table-cloths especially should be examined, and if there are any stains of tea or coffee on them they may be easily removed by pouring boiling water from a kettle straight through them. Fruit stains may likewise be treated in the same way, while tar should be removed by rubbing with butter, and paint with turpentine or methylated spirit.

CABBAGE AND GREENS.—During the cold weather it is very necessary to search diligently for caterpillars, as they creep into the innermost layers. Most cooks throw a handful of salt into the cleansing water, which kills them of course, but does not always force them to emerge from their hiding-places. It is a better way to prepare a large vessel of cold water, put into it just sufficient salt to give it a slightly saline taste, put a drop on the tongue to test. Then, after taking away all outer leaves, shake the vegetable well and plunge in; then leave it for half an hour, and you will find the caterpillars on the outside of the cabbage. Disliking the salt taste, they creep out to escape it, and can be easily picked off.

REMOVING GREASE FROM CLOTHES.—To remove grease from cloth, mix four teaspoonfuls of alcohol with one tablespoonful of salt, shake together until the salt is dissolved, then apply with a sponge. Or wet with weak ammonia water; then lay thin white blotting or tissue paper over it and iron lightly with an iron not too hot. Keep a piece of French chalk in the house for the grease spots that are always coming on children's clothes. Finely scraped and thoroughly rubbed in, it will often remove the spot. Or lay it on thickly and apply a hot iron with brown paper between.

CREAM CAKE.—One cup of granulated sugar, one cup of flour. Break two eggs in a cup, fill it up with sweet cream. Put sugar, cream, and eggs in a dish, and beat very light with an egg-beater, then add the flour, one teaspoonful of cream of tartar, and half a teaspoonful of soda and one of vanilla.

LINSEED TEA.—Few persons know how to make this properly. Put half an ounce of linseed into a jug and pour on to it a pint of boiling water; allow the infusion to stand for half an hour, and then strain off the tea into another jug, sweeten with honey or with sugar, and flavour with a few drops of orange flower water or essence of vanilla. This emollient and aperient drink is most effectual for the alleviation of gout, asthma, bronchitis, and colds.

TO YOUNG MOTHERS.—I would urge that great attention be paid to the milk of the bottle-fed baby. Milk, as is well known, quickly absorbs all odours and impurities. To sterilise milk, and render it free from any disease germ, it is well to boil it as soon as it is brought into the house, and thus free it from all impurities. Milk for a baby should be kept separate to that for the rest of the house. It should be stood in a basin, as near an open window as possible, and lightly covered with muslin to prevent any dust falling on it.

TO REMEDY A COLD.—For a cold on the chest, dip a piece of flannel in boiling water, sprinkle it with spirits of turpentine, and lay on the chest when retiring to rest.

DELICIOUS CABBAGE can be produced at any table if the following suggestions are followed. Cut a large cabbage into quarters; well wash it in salted water. Have ready a large saucepanful of boiling water, add a handful of salt and throw in the cabbage. When the vegetable is about half cooked drain it off, pour away the water, and fill the pan with clean boiling water and cook the cabbage till perfectly done. Drain the cabbage and chop it. Place a piece of butter in a saucepan, add the cabbage, and season with pepper, salt, and a teaspoonful of vinegar. Turn on to a vegetable dish and serve very hot. The cause of cabbage looking so unsightly and brown is that it is cooked in too small a quantity of water, which is not kept at the boiling point. Many people think it impossible to get good coloured cabbage without adding soda to the water; if they follow the above recipe they will find out their mistake.

AIR YOUR SHOES.—I wonder why it is that we air all our wearing apparel daily, all that is much worn, I mean, with the exception of our shoes, and yet these require it more than anything else. Boots should never be worn on two successive days, and on days when they are not worn they should be thoroughly exposed to the air. This simple treatment will greatly add to the comfort of the feet.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

CHILDREN'S SCRAP BOOKS.—A pleasant occupation for children, and one that will cause them to think of others not so fortunate as themselves, is to make scrap books for the children's hospitals. Coloured pictures, or plain black and white ones, may be cut from the illustrated papers, and pasted into home-made books. These pictures have the power of giving so much happiness to some one that it seems wicked to let them accumulate in the attic or go to feed the kitchen fire. To the older children may be given the task of cutting out short stories and of arranging them neatly in an envelope, or of pasting them in a book.

BRASS TRAYS really do not require all the care you appear to be bestowing on them to be kept nicely. Wash the tray constantly with hot soapy water; if it should be very dirty, put a little soda in the water. Take the tray out of the soapy water, pour boiling water over it, and let it remain for an hour. Dry carefully with a soft cloth. Take a fresh lemon and rub the tray vigorously with it. This will be found to brighten the brass well; should any stains remain, rub them with lemon dipped in fine table-salt. Polish with a leather, and you will, I think, find your trays as good as new again. If trays are cleaned regularly they are no trouble, but it is difficult sometimes to remove stains from figured brass.

MEAT FIBRINE.—This is a most valuable help in emergencies, and should be kept in every house. The preparation is very easy, and is as follows. Cut a coarse piece of lean beef in long thin strips, roll them in flour, and string them on a cork. Hang up on a ceiling-hook in the kitchen, and leave all night to dry. Place in a dry safe during the day, and hang again at night until thoroughly dry, and leave, after that, in a cool dry storeroom until hard. Then grind in a mill kept for the purpose; sift through coarse muslin, and bottle for use. Keep dry, and cork closely. To improve stock, gravy, or soup, add a little powder, according to strength required. Liver will answer the purpose, but it takes a long time to dry, and does not contain so large a proportion of nutritive value.

A NEURALGIC HEADACHE may be greatly relieved thus. Have a small flannel bag filled with hops, pour about a pint of boiling water on it, place it afterwards on a dry thick cloth, and wring dry. Apply this bag to the affected part, cover with flannel. The hops should be replaced with fresh ones after once or twice using.

FRICANDEAU OF VEAL.—Take a four-pound fillet of veal, lard on one side. Pare and slice one turnip, one carrot, one onion, and one stalk of celery, and put them in a braising-pan with one bay leaf, a bunch of parsley, and a teaspoonful of salt. Lay the veal on the top of these, with the larded side up, and pour around it one quart of soup stock. Cover the pan, and set in a moderate oven to bake for two hours. Baste two or three times. When done, take the meat up and serve with brown sauce.

CHEESE STICKS.—To make cheese sticks prepare nice puff paste in the following manner: Take one-fourth of a pound of butter, wash in cold water, dry thoroughly and divide into two parts. Sift four ounces of flour and divide that into two parts. Also, add part of the butter to part of the flour, and wet with very cold water sufficient to make a soft dough. Roll out thin and lard all over with one-fourth of the remaining butter. Sprinkle over one-fourth of the flour, fold the pastry over and roll lightly. Do this until each fourth of the butter and flour is expended; then roll out quite thin, commence at one end and roll up. Place in a cloth on the ice an hour, roll out thinly, spread with grated cheese, fold over, roll out again and spread with cheese. Roll thin, and cut in strips nine inches long and one half inch wide. Bake in a quick oven until light brown. They can be heated in a moment for the table.

CROQUETTES OF COLD MEAT.—Take a teacupful of finely chopped cold meat, freed from skin and fat, ditto well-boiled rice. Put about a gill of milk on the fire in a saucepan; add half an ounce of butter, the rice, and milk; season all with white pepper, salt, and a little chopped parsley. When the mixture is hot through stir in a well-beaten egg. Leave until slightly cool, and form into cutlets; dip into egg and bread-crumbs, and fry in deep fat. Drain well on paper by the fire and serve. This forms a very good supper dish, for it is both light and nourishing without being at all extravagant.

FLOUR BALLS are an economical addition to a hash or stew, making the meat go further. Make a paste of flour, finely minced suet, baking powder, and milk, seasoning with pepper, salt, and a pinch of herbs. Form into balls the size of a walnut, and drop them into the stew half an hour before serving. Be careful not to lift the lid after dropping in the balls until you dish the stew, or they will be heavy.

HOME NOTES.

CURE OF OBESITY.—Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., has long been famous for his remedy for the cure of obesity. Those who suffer from this difficulty will, by sending 4d. to the above address, receive Mr. Russell's pamphlet, containing testimonials from a great number of persons who have been benefited by the treatment, as well as a recipe for it. It matters not what be the weather or season, those who are troubled suffer equally in hot weather and in cold; in summer they are overburdened by their own weight, in winter bronchial ailments are set up through the least cold, as the air tubes are not free to act, as they would otherwise do without the obstruction. Mr. Russell undertakes that persons under his treatment should lose one stone a month in weight, and that their health, strength, and activity should be regenerated.

The following are extracts from other journals:

A POSITIVE REMEDY FOR CORPULENCE.—Any remedy that can be suggested as a cure or alleviation for stoutness will be heartily welcomed. We have recently received a well-written book, the author of which seems to know what he is talking about. It is entitled "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages), and is a cheap issue (only 4d.), published by Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, 27, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. Our space will not do justice to this book; send for it yourself. It appears that Mr. Russell has submitted all kinds of proofs to the English Press. The editor of "The Tablet," the Catholic organ, writes: "Mr. Russell does not give us the slightest loophole for a doubt as to the value of his cure, for in the most straightforward and matter-of-fact manner he submitted some hundreds of original and unsolicited testimonial letters for our perusal, and offered us plenty more if required. To assist him to make this remedy known, we think we cannot do better than publish quotations from some of the letters submitted. The first one, a marchioness, writes from Madrid:—'My son, Count —, has reduced his weight in twenty-two days 16 kilos - i.e., 34 lbs.' Another writes:—'So far (six weeks from the commencement of following your system) I have lost fully two stone in weight.' The next (a lady) writes:—'I am just half the size.' A

fourth:—'I find it is successful in my case. I have lost 8 lbs. in weight since I commenced (two weeks).' Another writes:—'A reduction of 18 lbs. in a month is a great success.' A lady from Bournemouth writes:—'I feel much better, have less difficulty in breathing, and can walk about.' Again, a lady says:—'It reduced me considerably, not only in the body, but all over.' The author is very positive. He says:—"Step on a weighing machine on Monday morning and again on Tuesday, and I guarantee that you have lost 2 lbs. in weight without the slightest harm, and vast improvement in health through ridding the system of unhealthy accumulations."—"Cork Herald."

CURE FOR OBESITY AT LAST.—Now Monsieur Pasteur and great Mr. Koch, and all other "made in Germany" cures, look well to your laurels. We have now an Englishman who has discovered a real remedy for corpulence. The proof of this is demonstrated by a person stepping on a weighing-machine in twenty-four hours after commencing his treatment. Not so with your "dog-bite" business, M. Pasteur, and not so with your bacillic exterminator, Mr. Koch. The results of your investigations are comparatively cloudy. Who knows whether a person, for instance, would have died from hydrophobia, and how is it that the inoculation is admitted to fail on many occasions? Simply because the "cure" is not perfect. Now let all fat persons read "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages), published by F. C. Russell, our British Specialist, of Woburn House, 27, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., price only 4d., but worth twenty times as much. There you will find that an English chemist can remove 14 lbs. of superfluous fat and waste from the system in seven days with herbs which you can gather in our British meadows. He has likewise shown the Continental theorists that their doctrines are untenable when they say that to reduce fat one must eat and drink less. The wind is completely out of their sails, for patients under Mr. Russell's treatment become more healthy, and their appetite improves immediately after the removal of the first 2 lbs. of unhealthy accumulation, and this happens in about twenty-four hours. Send for this book. We have just had it brought under our notice; it is well worth reading. — "Dover Express."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

TO SEPARATE THE YOLKS AND WHITES OF EGGS, break the shell on the edge of a basin, then pass the yolk quickly from one half shell to the other, letting the white fall into the basin below. In this way the yolk will remain unbroken in the shell. When the yolks and whites are beaten separately, the yolks should be beaten until pale, and the whites to so stiff a froth that they will not fall from the bowl, even though it be turned upside down.

CHEERFULNESS and good spirits depend in a great measure upon bodily causes, but much may be done in the promotion of this turn of mind. Persons subject to low spirits should make the rooms in which they live look as cheerful as possible, taking care that the paper with which the wall is covered is of a brilliant colour, hanging up pictures or prints, and placing beautiful china on the chimney-pieces and walls. A bay-window, looking upon pleasant objects, and, above all, a large fire when the weather will permit, are favourable to good spirits, and the tables near should be strewn with books and pamphlets. Add to these some manual employment, and such eating and drinking as is consistent with health, and cheerfulness must result.

INDIAN CORN CAKE, I am assured by the reader who sent this recipe, is excellent either with golden syrup or butter. Rub half a teacupful of butter into a breakfastcupful of flour and the same quantity of Indian meal. When thoroughly mixed add half a teacupful of sugar, half a teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda, and three-quarters of a teaspoonful of cream of tartar. Stir in sufficient milk to make the mixture of the consistency of very thick porridge, and add a well-beaten egg. Well grease a large flat baking tin, pour the mixture evenly into this, and bake for half an hour, when a knife plunged into the cake and quickly withdrawn should be free from steam. Cut into squares and eat cold.

TRY COLD-WATER COFFEE, for in its preparation it cannot be spoilt, as other coffee is, by the water not being quite boiling. Allow one large tablespoonful of ground coffee for each cup, and one extra for the pot, if strong coffee be liked. Put the coffee in a lined saucepan and pour on it the required amount of cold water. Let it boil up once, then pour a cupful of cold water suddenly into it, to settle it; or another way to settle it is to stir one beaten egg with a tablespoonful of cold water, and throw that into it. Thus the liquor is rendered beautifully clear.

EXCELLENT GRAVY FOR HASHES, ETC.—Time, two hours and a quarter. The bones and cuttings from any cooked joint, a little salt and pepper, twelve whole allspice, a bunch of sweet herbs, a piece of butter, one small onion, half a head of celery, water, and two tablespoonfuls of ketchup. Break the bones, and put them in a stewpan with any spare cuttings of meat you may have; add a little pepper, salt, and twelve allspice, half a head of celery, and a bunch of sweet herbs, and simmer it for about two hours with sufficient water to cover it. Cut a small onion into slices, fry it in a piece of butter, and boil it up with the gravy for fifteen or twenty minutes. Strain it into another stewpan with two tablespoonfuls of walnut ketchup, and a piece of butter rolled in flour. Boil it up, and it will be ready for your meat.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR OVEN.—Housekeepers, careful in other ways, frequently neglect to see that the oven is kept well, and consequently have tainted custard and milk puddings at their table without knowing the cause. In all houses the oven should be well scrubbed out after cooking, with plenty of hot soda water and soap. Any hard substance which is caked on to the baking sheets should be scraped off with an old knife. It is really very simple to have the oven scrubbed out, while it is still hot, after baking a joint, game, etc., and many disagreeable smells are avoided by this practice. For the purpose I strongly recommend the use of a long brush, such as is used to clean carriage wheels, and called a "spoke" brush, for with it the back wall of the oven can easily be reached, and the danger of burnt hands avoided.

MARMALADE PUDDING.—Put alternate layers of stale sponge cake and marmalade into a buttered pie-dish until full, the layers of marmalade being very thin. Beat up two eggs in a pint of milk, pour over the pudding, and let it soak for half an hour. Melt a piece of butter, pour it over the pudding, sprinkle castor sugar over, and bake till the custard is nicely set. Serve when cold, garnished with a few pieces of the marmalade peel.

If you want to make a nice present you cannot do better than write to the Pearson Pottery Co., Hanley, Staffs, who have some really wonderful parcels of china at nominal prices. Fancy a Dinner Service of fifty pieces, besides a china Tea Service and sundry useful crockery for 21s. This they will send securely packed direct to your friend if you let them have the address.

